

SS.CC Jubilarians - 2022



Fr. Columban Crotty, ss.cc. Platinum 70th Jubilee of Profession

In South Kilkenny, Ireland there is a hill call Tory Hill, which we were told as children was only 45 feet short of being a mountain and was once the hide-out of a famous rapparee, who robbed the rich to help the poor. The hill also had a prehistoric tomb. Tory Hill also commands breath-taking views of the surrounding countryside including the village of Mullinavat, where I was born. There was an ancient tradition of climbing to the top of Tory Hill on July 8 to enjoy the view and pick Fraughan berries, a variety of blueberry, that grew along the hill side among the beautiful wild flowers. I remember how excited I was when my parents permitted my three brothers, my sister and I to join in the steep ascent to the hill top.

The beautiful and peaceful countryside seen from the top of Tory Hill was reflective of the quiet and tranquil life I experienced as a young boy. Religion was a very vital part of everyday life in Mullinavat and in my family. A picture of the Sacred Heart was in the most prominent place in our kitchen with a small oil lamp with a bright red globe; my brothers and I had the task of keeping oil in the lamp. Every evening we recited the Rosary on our knees facing the statue and on First Fridays attended Mass.

One of the few magazines we got was called ‘The Far East’ published by the Society of St. Columban, where stories of the missionaries in China were fascinating for me. I also read at that time a story of Father Damien and the lepers of Molokai. It was probably no surprise then when Fr. Killian O Sullivan spoke at our school inviting us to join his Congregation of the Sacred Hearts which is committed to devotion to the hearts of Jesus and Mary, the missions and adoration that I became aware of where the Lord was calling me to.

When I entered the novitiate of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts, I had no idea that the novitiate had just been established and that I was one of the first two novices. The novice master and the superior had come from the United States but both had joined the Congregation and made their religious and clerical studies in Belgium. For a time there was uncertainty whether my fellow novice and I would go Belgium or the United States for further studies. We began studying French but that was dropped when the decision was made that we would go to the United States

We began our seminary studies in philosophy near the town of Wareham in Massachusetts across the canal from beautiful Cape Cod. It was an experience of a whole new cultural and way of life but the community was very welcoming and helped us to adjust. Our fellow seminarians who came from various areas of the United States sometimes could not conceal their merriment at our Irish expressions and accent. For us there was the new experience of coffee for breakfast, corn on the cob, hot dogs and peanut butter. From Wareham we went to Queen of Peace Seminary in Jaffrey, New Hampshire for our theological studies. The seminary was not far from Mount Monadnock which was another memorable climbing experience for me with different but wonderful views.

I will move on from seminary life in the United States to life in Tokyo, Japan, where I and three classmates, now ordained to the priesthood, began our studies of the Japanese language in the Franciscan Language School. There was a large group of students from various orders and congregations, but we divided into small classes. The four of us from the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary were together in one class. For two years we wrestled with the language in the school and were fascinated by the culture and customs of Japan, the kindness of the people, the crowded trains and busses and the glitter of Tokyo at night.

After our studies in Tokyo the four of us were separated and each of us went to a different mission station with an experienced missionary. There are different 'expressions' of the Japanese language. What we learned in Tokyo was the polite version but the people where I was stationed spoke 'everyday' Japanese where the polite words were abbreviated and spoken quickly, too quickly for me. However time took care of everything.

The early missionaries had established small communities and one of my first experiences was instructing a group of High School students, girls and boys who were either Catholic or interesting in learning about Catholicism. There were also a few young men who decided to enter the Congregation and were doing their clerical studies. For me it was a very happy time of my life. We had people coming to Church, catechumens studying, young people in our youth groups. Several of the missionaries were just a couple of years older than I. We met every Monday for half days of recollection, listening to speakers and studying and in the afternoon played volleyball and enjoyed the beautiful sights and wonders of Japan.

In time, things changed. Just as happened in the United States there were changes in society that affected people's attitude to religion. Japan in a relatively short time became one of the leading industrial nations of the world. Workers came under more stress; students had to devote more time to studies in order to succeed in college entrance examinations. Technology in addition to introducing many benefits to daily living also introduced many time-consuming distractions. It has been several years since I returned from Japan after seventeen years in mission there. At present the Catholic population is still relatively small but there is a vibrant community there which has been helped to a great extent by the arrival of foreign workers, many of whom are Catholics from the Philippines, Indonesia and South American countries.

In recent times I have been privileged to spend some years in India and some months in the Philippines and everywhere I have seen wonderful people, young and old, responding to the Lord's call to follow him and share God's love with their brothers and sisters.